

EPAs Science Advisory Board Says No to Review of Agency's Compendium on Secondary Smoke

SAB Said to Have Resisted Pressure From Tobacco Lobby, Virginia Congressman

EPA

By Leslie Hickey
Advised by EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) not to review a major document on the health effects of secondhand smoke, congressional sources say, they initially refused to review the document on the grounds that it "was not even contained in the draft that went out to [EPA] peer review."

Instead, went on to say they the majority of reviewers—*all of whom* represented the tobacco industry's

view—were highly critical of the data.

Denying it was any undue pressure on SAB, the Tobacco Industry's Environmental Defense and Tobacco Action Services, has quashed a report by an independent committee of scientists from independent organizations that found the industry's

executive committee, noting that the annual death figure contained in the compendium (\$3,000) was "unsubstantiated and unsupported by data presented in the report."

But one of the report's authors, Steven Glantz of the University of California's Cardiology Department, says this figure wasn't questioned in earlier scientific reviews. "I am greatly puzzled as to why Mr. Aspinwall, who is not a scientist, is making the statement and [that] he's making it—mainly because it addresses all suspected health effects, even those whose risks have not yet been scientifically established."

Anti-smoking groups say EPA was pressured by tobacco industry lobbyists and Rep. Thomas Bliley, R-Va., to have SAB review the compendium. Bliley, who's home state's number two em-

ployer is the Philip Morris Co., also sits on the House Energy and Commerce Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over EPA's science advisory panel process.

EPA, the industry says, "had no choice but to review a major document on the health effects of secondhand smoke," suggesting they initially refused to review the document on the grounds that it "was not even contained in the draft that went out to [EPA] peer review."

Aspinwall went on to say they the majority of reviewers—*all of whom* represented the tobacco industry's—were highly critical of the data. Denying it was any undue pressure on SAB, the Tobacco Industry's Environmental Defense and Tobacco Action Services, has quashed a report by an independent committee of scientists from independent organizations that found the industry's

executive committee, noting that the annual death figure contained in the compendium (\$3,000) was "unsubstantiated and unsupported by data presented in the report."

"There's no way it could stand up to a scientific review," she said.

One organization, the Washington, D.C.-based anti-smoking lobby Action on Smoking and Tobacco Health (ASTH), is pleased with SAB's decision, and applauds the organization for "having resisted the tobacco industry's attempt to水

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concerned by pulling it out of concern, he said.

Such preliminary information gathering is generally the first step in the scientific review process. But it's important to note that the information is being collected and weighed the importance of the data must occur, in order for such a document to be released, and placed in the public domain.

"Science is science," said ASH Executive Director John Runthaf, who maintains that the information is significant and should be available for public inspection. Last May, Runthaf called for the release of the compendium under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) after EPA refused to make the document public, despite the fact that the tobacco industry had allegedly received a copy of it. As a result, EPA released [to ASH] a copy of the document, which Runthaf says provides further evidence and support to induce the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to regulate, place.

But EPA has yet to conduct an assessment of the heart disease literature, for which the data are "simply not as definitive as they are for lung cancer and respiratory effects," according to researchers.

"There are many factors involved in the cause of a disease," said a researcher at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), who asked not to be identified. "Some are known and some are unknown, making it difficult to assess the cause of the disease, let alone the risk. In the case of heart disease, other components such as diet and heredity factor into the risks."

EPA officials say its risk assessment on tobacco smoke, which concentrates on lung cancer and childhood respiratory disorders, holds more validity for research scientists, because it focuses on an specific area. Further, it has already undergone extensive scientific review.

Amidst the growing body of re-

search that suggests cigarette smoking may cause cancer and other diseases—

coupled with individual agenda con-

cerning the use of tobacco and tobacco-related products—some say it's im-

portant not to bypass the scientific method. "It's probably better to get a

smaller picture that's accurate, than a

larger picture that's not so accurate," said the NCI researcher.

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